

VZCZCXR00142
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #2662/01 3100722
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 060722Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2891
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 1616

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 002662

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH KUMASI REGIONAL MINISTER

REF: ACCRA 2549 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Ashanti Regional Minister Emmanuel Owusu-Ansah told the Ambassador during an October 25 meeting that he is committed to a secure and drug-free Ashanti region. Ansah requested Embassy assistance in training community policemen to deter petty crime and in setting up an export program for Kente cloth, possibly through the provisions of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). End Summary.

ANSAH: NARCO-TRAFFICKING ALLEGATIONS UNTRUE

¶2. (U) The Ambassador, accompanied by PolChief and Econoff, met with Ashanti Regional Minister Emmanuel Asamoah Owusu-Ansah on October 25 during a visit to Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti Region and Ghana's second largest city. Ansah, who formerly served as Deputy Attorney General and Minister of Justice until his re-appointment in May, also represents the Kwabre West Constituency in the Ashanti Region as a Member of Parliament. As capital of the Ashanti Region, Kumasi is home to the Asantehene (King of the Asante, aka Ashanti) and is considered by many Ghanaians to be the cultural heart of Ghana.

¶3. (SBU) Referring to allegations linking the Asantehene to narcotics trafficking that surfaced during the course of the Justice Georgina Wood Committee's investigation into Ghana's narcotics scandal (reported reftels), Ansah said it was unfortunate that someone would start a smear campaign against the Asantehene. Ansah said that while he believed the Asantehene is innocent, he did not support the verbal attacks and threats that some pro-Asante groups in Kumasi have made toward journalists pursuing the allegations. (Note: members of the Asante Youth Association and the Asante United Front, both pressure groups in Kumasi, threatened to ?eliminate? four journalists they accused of being disrespectful to the Asantehene. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador stressed the need for preventing violence and unrest and suggested that Ansah and other community leaders engage the agitated youth in dialogue. Ansah told the Ambassador he has seen no other evidence of narcotics trafficking or drug problems in his region. Ansah affirmed his commitment to combat violence and narco-trafficking in his region, adding, ?We appreciate our freedom; we have come a long way and we are not going to throw it away.?

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Government silence in responding to threats made against the journalists suggests that the GOG is selective on threats against the media and affirms

the widespread perception by non-Ashantis that the Asantehene and those who speak in his defense are above the law. Given that less violent threats from opposition supporters in the recent past resulted in criminal prosecutions, police inaction in this case may encourage a sense of impunity for Asantehene supporters. End Comment.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND CRIME REDUCTION

¶ 6. (U) Ansah attributed the increase in petty crimes in his region, such as cell phone thefts, to the influx of neighboring West African immigrants, who bring with them different lifestyles. He acknowledged that the decline of the ?traditional Ghanaian lifestyle? had also contributed to this problem, and suggested that the answer to reducing crime is more youth employment. In response to Ansah?s request for possible Embassy assistance in training youth as neighborhood watchmen, PolChief noted that the Embassy sponsored a police training workshop in Kumasi a few years ago, after which police officers were given bicycles to assist in conducting community patrols.

AGOA AND KENTE CLOTH

¶ 7. (U) Responding to Ansah?s expression of interest in developing a U.S. market for Ghana?s indigenous kente cloth, the Ambassador reminded Ansah of the advantages of exporting kente to the United States under the African

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Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The Ambassador referred Ansah to the Embassy?s Commercial Attaché to explore the topic further.

BRIDGEWATER